

Q1. Why did the Ministry of Labour conduct this school safety inspection?

A: Ministry of Labour (MOL) inspectors conducted health and safety inspections in schools to raise awareness of workplace health and safety hazards and to promote compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations. The stepped-up enforcement was part of the province's *Safe at Work Ontario* strategy.

Q2. When did the workplace health and safety inspections in schools take place?

A: The inspections were conducted from September 2011 to June 2012.

Q3. Which schools were visited as part of this initiative?

A: Inspections were conducted at more than 900 workplaces (schools and school boards) across the publicly-funded school systems including elementary (grades 7 and 8) and secondary schools with technological education labs and shops and science labs. Private schools were not part of this initiative.

Q4. What are some examples of occupational health and safety issues in schools?

A: Examples of health and safety issues could include:

- Ensuring eye-wash fountains are available
- Ensuring machine guarding is adequate and maintained
- Safe material handling and ladder use procedures
- Ensuring that lifting devices are inspected
- Adequate guardrails
- Protection against electrical, chemical, fire and other hazards
- Compliance with the statutory requirements for a workplace Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) or health and safety representatives
- Ensuring that JHSC meetings and workplace inspections take place.
- Adequate training and supervision of workers

Q5. What did MOL inspectors look for?

A: MOL inspectors focused on the following:

- Compliance with the OHSA
- Personal protective equipment (i.e., safety glasses, goggles, and gloves), eye-wash stations and safety showers were available and maintained.
- Roles and responsibilities of employers, supervisors and workers (Internal Responsibility System i.e., IRS) were being complied with at the workplace.
- That workers were provided with information, instruction and supervision to protect their health and safety.
- Employers were meeting workplace violence and workplace harassment requirements.
- Equipment maintenance
- Safety measures and procedures were in place to prevent injuries and occupational illness from specific hazards including, but not limited to:
 - machine guarding/shielding (e.g., potential for a worker to be exposed to a moving part or pinch point)

Ministry of Labour School Safety Inspection Results
Q's and A's – Winter 2013

- chemical hazards (e.g., unsafe storage or handling of chemicals, compressed gases)
- safe handling and storage of flammable liquids, hot work (e.g., when welding, grinding or cutting could cause a spark near flammable or combustible materials)
- slip, trip and fall hazards.

Q6. What safety resources has the government provided to the school boards to help them in meeting their responsibilities?

A: To guide school boards through the multitude of available health and safety products, the Ministry of Education has compiled and posted on its website links to those resources produced by the Ministry of Labour and other Ontario occupational health and safety system partners:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/workplace.html>

Also, the Ministry of Education has provided supports for the production of resources by experts in the field. For example, EDU collaborates with and funds projects led by provincial subject associations on an on-going basis. For example, the Ministry has funded:

- **“OCTELab” Project**, Ontario Council for Technology Education (OCTE):
 - interactive, web-based tool intended for educators to explain and highlight safety in technological education; linked to curriculum
 - project anticipated completion date: Winter 2013; rollout: Spring 2013
- **Fire Safety Resource**, Science Teachers’ Association of Ontario (STAO):
 - six instructional videos and workshop/ training materials intended for educators
 - English and French-language resources are posted on the STAO website:
<http://stao.ca/>
- **Safe ON Science**, Science Teachers’ Association of Ontario (STAO)
 - resource written by a panel of experienced teachers with a strong background in science safety
 - topics addressed include: legislation, classroom safety considerations and specific considerations for Physics, Chemistry and Biology
- **Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines (OSG)**, Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea):
 - since October 2012, Ophea receives annualized funding to support province-wide access to the OSG free-of-charge and without password-protection
 - the OSG are comprised of elementary and secondary activity guidelines in three areas: interschool, intramural and curricular
 - the Guidelines are considered a minimum standard for risk management practice by school personnel involved in physical activities for students

Q7. When was the last time the Ministry of Education provided special funding to school boards for technological education programs?

A: In March 2005, the Ministry of Education flowed \$45M to school boards to support quality programs in technological education. This funding was to be used to address priorities identified in boards’ long-range plans, specifically student pathways, community connections, professional learning and capacity for leadership, program development, and facility and equipment.

Q8. What requirements are in place to ensure that schools are regularly maintained and safe for students?

A: The *Education Act* and Regulation 298 include broad provisions that refer to the responsibility of school boards, principals and teachers for student health and safety in school. The *Education Act* requires:

- school boards to “keep the school buildings and premises in proper repair and in a proper sanitary condition, provide suitable furniture and equipment and keep it in proper repair, and protect the property of the board” (paragraph 170(1)8).
- the principal to:
 - “Give assiduous attention to the health and comfort of the pupils, to the cleanliness, temperature and ventilation of the school, to the care of all teaching materials and other school property, and to the condition and appearance of the school buildings and grounds” (clause 265(1)(j)); and
 - “Report promptly to the board and to the medical officer of health when the principal has reason to suspect the existence of any communicable disease in the school, and of the unsanitary conditions of any part of the school building or the school grounds” (clause 265(1)(g)).

Under Regulation 298, principals are also required to:

- inspect the school premises at least weekly and report to the board any repairs that are required (clause 11(3)(1))
- consider the best possible program and the safety and well-being of students when assigning or appointing a teacher to teach in a division or to teach a subject in a school, (subsection 19(1))

Under Regulation 298, teachers are required to ensure that all reasonable safety procedures are carried out in courses and activities for which the teacher is responsible (clause 20(g)).

Through the Ontario Public Health Standards, boards of health are required to work with school boards to influence the development and implementation of healthy policies and programs, and the creation or enhancement of safe and supportive environments (i.e., injury prevention) and on increasing public awareness of and adoption of behaviours that are in accordance with current legislation related to the prevention of injury.

Q9. How is health and safety addressed in the revised curriculum documents?

A: Health and safety is addressed in every revised elementary and secondary curriculum policy document. Each of the ten technological education programs include overall and specific expectations about health and safety procedures relevant to the program. The health and safety revised learning expectations are tailored to the grade level and subject matter. For example, before using a piece of equipment or tool, students must be able to demonstrate knowledge of how the equipment or tool works and of the procedures they must follow to ensure its safe use.

In secondary Science and elementary Science and Technology, for example, specific expectations related to safety are included in the expectations that focus on *Scientific Investigation Skills* in secondary and in the expectations that focus on *Developing Investigation and Communication Skills* in the elementary curriculum. For example, “students will apply

knowledge and understanding of safe practices and procedures when planning investigations, with the aid of appropriate support materials.”

The revised curriculum documents emphasize that teachers are responsible for ensuring the safety of students during classroom activities and for encouraging and motivating students to assume responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

Q10. Are students required to complete mandatory training sessions about health and safety before they begin classroom work (particularly in high-risk areas such as technological education labs and shops and science labs)?

A: While EDU is responsible for developing curriculum policy, implementation of policy is the responsibility of school boards. Teachers plan units of study, develop a variety of teaching approaches, and select appropriate resources to address the curriculum expectations, taking into account the needs and abilities of the students in their classes.

Before using any piece of equipment or any tool, it is recommended that as part of good teaching practice teachers should provide numerous opportunities for students to be able to demonstrate knowledge of how the equipment or tool works and of the procedures they must follow to ensure its safe use. Personal protective gear must be worn as required. The Ministry does not mandate that students' learning about safety be evaluated before beginning classroom work.

The Technological Education and Science curriculum policy documents include both overall and specific expectations related to Health and Safety. Safety must be addressed in classroom learning and in student evaluation such that students acquire the knowledge and skills needed for safe participation in classroom activities; personal protective gear must be worn as required.

Q11. What training related to health and safety are educators required to receive prior to working in technological education labs and shops and science labs?

A: As part of initial teacher training, all Technological Education and Science teacher education candidates receive training in health and safety, and study specific safety guidelines related to their subject area.

To qualify as a technological education teacher, a person must have completed an Ontario secondary school diploma, five years of work experience in a technological area of competence and a teacher education program focusing on technological education (which includes instruction in health and safety). The person must provide proof of their training, work experience, technological competence and language proficiency to the Ontario College of Teachers for teacher certification in one of the technological education subjects as set out in Schedule B of O. Regulation 176/10 (Teachers' Qualifications) under the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996.

To qualify as a science teacher, a person must have completed a postsecondary degree and a teacher education program focusing on science education (which includes instruction in health and safety). The person must provide proof of their training and language proficiency to the Ontario College of Teachers for teacher certification in one of the science-related subjects as set out in Schedule A of O. Regulation 176/10 (Teachers' Qualifications) under the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996.

As employers of teachers, school boards must take into consideration the safety and well-being of students in the classroom when hiring and assigning teachers to teach specific courses.

Q12. Is there any way for teachers to teach science or technological education courses without this certification?

A: A teacher must hold a Certificate of Qualification and Registration (CQR) to teach science or technological education. In science courses, the teacher's certificate will normally specify a qualification for teaching science curriculum (e.g. chemistry, biology, science-general) but a teacher whose CQR specifies a qualification in another general education subject may be assigned to teach science by mutual agreement of the teacher and principal and with the approval of a supervisory officer. In technological education courses, the teacher's certificate must specify a qualification for teaching technological education. As employers of teachers, school boards must take into consideration the safety and well-being of students in the classroom when hiring and assigning teachers to teach specific courses.

In limited circumstances, school boards may apply to the Ministry of Education for a Letter of Permission that enables an individual without a CQR to teach a specified subject.